

WHERE IS THE MORAL FORCE?

A most positive but strangely incongruous set of ideas seem to govern the thinking people of America, relative to the generality of opinion respecting the discovery of what has been termed by one very able writer our "Machiavellian commercialism." That the very industrious use of the "muck rake" has discovered a condition that is most startling in its universality, there is no question; but that there is any general moral revulsion at the horrible facts disclosed, is not only another question, but one to be seriously doubted. Not that the opinion is entertained, by the writer at least, that there has grown up somewhat suddenly a sense of the wrong done but without serious contemplation of the necessity of evoking means and methods to check, punish or prevent its repetition or continuance; but that there is a greater noticeable indifference to the facts and their consequences than is consistent with a healthy decency in the observance of honest and truthful methods.

About two years ago the original "muck rakers" plunged in the teeth of their rakes, and they have industriously plied them—still at work very earnestly and heartily—and have discovered to our every day observation conditions that should appeal to every honest man's pride and sense of shame, for some effort on his part, no matter how humble that effort, to destroy this too common vileness and make clean the places and parts infested. That an intelligent minority should apprehend the true situation of affairs and endeavor to evolve some method by which the wrong may be remedied, must be taken with that certainty that accompanies any proposition that has moral decency for its virtue.

A recent Berlin dispatch says, with reference to the meat inspection law just enacted: "It is not thought that the adoption of the new bill just passed by the American house of representatives will make any particular difference here, because confidence in American business methods is absolutely shaken, and the impression prevails that, even with the increased number of inspectors, the inspection will be worthless, as the packers will very soon corrupt inspectors with money."

It was the moral force, working like a leaven, that created the German opinion from a given statement of facts; nor will it avail anything to either deny its correctness or argue against its justness. It will take years of common truth and honesty, in our dealings with the world, to overcome the suspicion which the hurried rush after dishonest wealth by our mercantile leaders has brought upon us. The moral force of the world is against us.

The recent upheaval, caused by the murder of one bad man by another, and because of the fact that they were related to great wealth, nabobs, is but the printing of what men know to be the truth. The people, in their majority, care nothing for this wickedness, after once expressing their surprise at its horribleness. And there is not a man of intelligence in the world but who, though he may shudder at its open discovery to the world, knows to his perfect satisfaction of its truth—of the existence of this condition. A people will not concern itself with the sins or wickedness of men, until such faults obtrude upon their daily and most material affairs.

In all ages of the world when people have risen against what they deem wrong, either right has prevailed or destruction resulted, with greater evidence of the latter.

But that the majority of the people of America seem to learn of our ills, with a levity of indifference, there is very little question. Our condition has furnished columns for the humorous writers, and the people have laughed more at witticisms that bear upon our loss of shame, at shameful facts, than they have been indignant at the discovery of gross dishonesty and untruthfulness—that consider perjury justified in proportion to the value of the interests involved. Even now the people, remembering the action of the president, at the critical moment, are laughing at the railroad rate bill; they do not believe that it will benefit them, nor correct the railroad evils that it was intended to remedy. Why, one could actually feel the smile that spread over the west when it was believed that the president had not "toted fair" with Tillman.

Accredited honorable men, possessed of great wealth are thought little the less of, upon the discovery that their millions are ill-gotten; and their perjury is passed over without even the up-lifting of an eye lash.

"Befo' the wah," is a phrase used to prompt a smile, and is generally followed by a patroniz-

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ing story of the simplicity of the American in his then strict observance of the integrity of his word, the sacredness of his oath and the honor bound conscience that protected and sustained his honesty. What a contrast of morals in business, of the period "befo' the wah" and today!

The east is surfeited with opinions, expressed in every way, on every occasion, and in every place; and those opinions voice the "awakening of the public conscience," whilst the comic writer defines such awakening to be "an acquaintance with the amount of the swag." The middle and western states are prone to accept the humorist's version of the expression. The people of those states have an instinctive acquaintance with the insincerity of all proclamations of virtue. They have greater faith in the verdict of a jury that sends a thief or a perjurer to prison, than in all the proclamations and resolutions of purpose of all the leaders of thought on the continent. When a poor man was sent to prison for a long term for stealing, because he was hungry, and a rich bankrupt was allowed to go free, after positive proof of his having stolen a fortune—as was recently telegraphed over the country from New York—the people of the middle, south and western states smiled grimly; and, if you were to ask them why they smiled, they would probably reply: "Why, that's no more than we expect of those people." "But the law, the courts, the judges?" you exclaim. "Bosh!" is the answer; "they're all alike; the only differences are the influences and environment; they're all tarred with the same stick." The truth or falsity of such opinion is not the question; that is the way they express themselves, and so much the worse if what they believe be untrue. Sectionalism is an American fact and will always exist, right or wrong and notwithstanding the arguments of many of our most able publicists and thinkers of its tendencies. Anent our sectionalism, it is one of the strange things in this contemplation that our "muck" beds are of greater extent and of more prolific vileness, in the midst of wealth and wealth-producing culture (?) than elsewhere. And it would seem the greater the wealth the more extensive and vile the "muck," as though great American wealth and "muck" vileness—whether in government, society or the commercial world—were consistent. Are the American nabob and "muck" synonymous?

That a great part of the uncovered "muck" exists in the west, the people well know; but they, also, firmly believe that the financial methods which inaugurated "muck" systems, supported them to their perfect operation, and sustained them in utter disregard of all moral consequences—so long as they proved profitable—originated and are maintained in the east. The people do not believe that they are awake, that the "public conscience" is alive to the imperative necessity of a prompt remedying of our ills, in the sense that they have any faith in the very near accomplishment of so desirable a result and the reason is that so long as the individual man does not feel, or in some way physically experience the general wrong in its operation upon his personal comfort, life or affairs, he is more or less indifferent to the general fact. Also, he knows that there is so much politics mixed up in our business affairs, and believes that an extensive corruption controls in all political organizations—whether ward primary or national congress—that he has no faith in the sincerity of the declared purpose of men, no matter how sincerely they may talk or how independent they may wish to appear. The apathy to a condition is not destroyed by a most commendable desire that it should not exist. A late justification of such an opinion was when, in the senate of the United States, a senator from Illinois declared that a rich banker who had violated the law, having paid his creditors (by what legerdemain he did not say) in full, therefore he should be held not guilty of wrong and that all people should be satisfied and content in that the senator's constituent had paid "one hundred per cent." One western editor, with an utter disregard of all "senatorial courtesy" has since referred to the Illinois senator as "One-Hundred-per-cent-Hopkins."

The people believe—whether they be right

or wrong—that those who realize enormous profits from present conditions are in control of those conditions, and that they will not change them so as to prevent a continuance of opportunity to themselves to realize those profits. For instance, the people know that the friends of the high protective tariff are the staunch friends and loyal supporters of the republican party, and that that party in its last national platform, declared that any revision of our tariff should be made by its friends. As such friends reap great benefits and profits from such high tariff, they are not likely to so change it as to deprive themselves of any considerable proportion of such benefits and profits. And yet, knowing this, how may the constructive support of such a declaration be explained, except upon the theory that the people paid no attention to it, but were governed by their impulses, prejudices, sympathies or indifference? Nor is this explained away by the fact that the democrats may have deserved defeat for refusing to take the people into their confidence.

The people laughed at us democrats for permitting the trickery at St. Louis to speak as our party action, and they voted in accordance with that laugh; but what can account for their neglect of their laugh at the idea of the benefiting friends of high tariff revising that tariff so as to curtail their own benefits? True, President Roosevelt's personal character was in sufficient contrast to the methods practiced by and at the convention of the other party as to cause the people to feel a greater confidence in him, regardless of his party and its platform, than in the disgraceful conduct of the democrats weakly submitted to by a convention that was morally convinced of the contemptible abasement to which it was subjected. But even then the smile of the people was one—as it is today—expressive more of a lack of faith in the protestations of sincerity than in a fact that there was anything to laugh at.

The moral force in a people is the most powerful quality known, and the most indefinable and uncertain. It is slightly similar to the sentiment prompted in a man who, never having been a soldier, yet as he walks along, hearing a band playing martial music, straightens his shoulders and in a moment is keeping strict step to the time of the music. Or, again, that one may see in a big, wholesome, God-appointed man, looking at a closely contested horse race; and he sees a game thoroughbred fighting so hard to win that he staggers as he comes up the home stretch—and the tears will come into that man's eyes, his hands will be clenched until the nails cut into the flesh of his palms, and his voice will literally break from him in a hoarse whisper: "Good boy! brave boy!"—and a cold blooded neighbor wonders if he is crazy. What is it? The moral force. The eastern man mutters "pool box," or "the books," but the eastern man seldom broadens wide enough to believe that other men are different from himself. And, possibly, that is one reason why a western man smiles at proclamations of virtue emanating from that source. In politics this force is as invincible as a tornado. When will it come? No man born of woman has had the wisdom to foresee, analyze or understand it—at best he can but logically comprehend. But in this hour when, from every rostrum, every pulpit, newspaper editorials by the hundred, there is a cry against the "muck systems," the particulars of which have been daily, even hourly, telegraphed over the world—when Europe, standing aghast, sneers, and holds us in contempt—where is that moral force? Will it speak? Will it regulate? Or will it destroy? Will it be governed by reason or will wild fury control and as a storm destroy to destruction and leave chaos for an amen? Will the guilty save themselves ere it be too late—too late for us all?

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MRS. LAWSON

Because of his great service in the exposure of the methods of "the system" Thomas W. Lawson is known in nearly every American home, and it may be gratifying to the Boston financier to know that thousands of American men and women who are not personally acquainted with him, grieved sincerely when they learned of Mrs. Lawson's death. The Commoner feels that it is authorized to extend to Mr. Lawson the sincere condolence of Commoner readers.